

1994 NWS&GC MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S MOUNTAIN SHEEP MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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QUESTION: Does your state or province have an identifiable sheep management program?

The province of British Columbia has an identifiable, but loosely structured sheep management program.

QUESTION: What is your guiding policy statement?

Provincial policy is to retain the existing herds and their supporting habitat.

QUESTION: What are your management goals?

Management goals are:

1. Maintain an optimum abundance of the various species and subspecies.
2. Provide reasonable levels of consumptive and non-consumptive uses of the resource.

QUESTION: What methods do you use to reach them?

Management planning is guided by a Preliminary Mountain Sheep Management Plan for British Columbia.

Regional sheep management plans are developed for each region of the province where sheep occur (all regions except Vancouver Island and Lower Mainland). Provincial program coordination is overseen by the Wildlife Branch in Victoria.

QUESTION: How much effort is devoted to reaching them?

Wildlife managers spend a disproportionate amount of time on mountain sheep management over the

management of other wildlife species. However, there are no provincial personnel who are employed exclusively to manage mountain sheep.

QUESTION: What is your operating budget for sheep management?

No specific operational funds are set aside annually for sheep management in the province.

Other Agency Participation in Sheep Management in British Columbia

Other agencies regularly or intermittently involved in sheep management in the province are: Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS), B.C. Wildlife Federation; Guide Outfitters Association of B.C.; Habitat Conservation Fund of B.C.; Wild Sheep Society of B.C.; Nature Trust of B.C.; Nature Conservancy of Canada; Canadian Wildlife Service; Okanagan Regional Wildlife Heritage Fund; Kootenay Wildlife Heritage Fund; East Kootenay Hunters Association; and East Kootenay Wildlife Association.

Additional Funding and Foundation for North American Wild Sheep Participation

No tabulation of the monetary or staff time contributions of these agencies toward sheep management in the province is available. FNAWS has been a fairly consistent contributor toward provincial sheep management, with approximately \$10,000 received annually. The province has not yet approved the donation of a sheep hunting permit to FNAWS for auction.

DISCUSSION

The Wildlife Branch of B.C., Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks coordinates the mountain sheep management program in the

province. Two species and four races of mountain sheep occur in British Columbia.

Thinhorn sheep (*Ovis dalli*) are located only in the northern half of the province and numbers are estimated at 12,000. Approximately 11,500 of these are classed as Stone sheep (*Ovis dalli stonei*) and approximately 500 as Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli dalli*).

Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) are located in the central and southern portions of the province and numbers are estimated at 8,000. Approximately 4,500 of these are classed as California bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis californiana*) and approximately 3,500 as Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*).

Management activities have primarily been devoted to setting sheep hunting regulations and carrying out selective population surveys. Other important activities carried out to varying degrees and/or in various regions include population transplants, range assessments, habitat acquisitions, and habitat enhancements.

Harvest regulations are mainly centered on open season ram hunting, using a curl regulation to limit harvests. Where "limited entry hunting" (draw for permits) occurs, there is a trend toward "any-ram" regulations. Permit ewe hunting also occurs on some bighorn sheep populations. Nonresident hunting is regulated in most areas by the allocation of a quota to licensed guide outfitters.

Some of the mountain sheep management issues of concern in the province of British Columbia are:

1. An up-to-date provincial mountain sheep management plan has not been developed.
2. As the operational management of mountain sheep populations is strongly regionalized,

some difficulties occur in developing a fully coordinated provincial management program. To some extent, the personal philosophies/preferences of individual regional wildlife biologists determine the type of program followed in a region.

3. Mountain sheep population inventory/survey data is inadequate (or in some areas virtually non-existent) in all regions of the province.
4. The mortality factors that are controlling the numbers of mountain sheep are not adequately understood in most populations. However, wolf predation on thinhorn sheep and cougar and coyote predation on bighorn sheep are known to be important mortality factors for some populations.
5. Horn-curl regulations continue to be of some administrative concern. Difficulties in handling enforcement and hunter appeals following confiscation of marginal sheep, although not numerous, are time consuming for staff and a traumatic experience for individual hunters.
6. The need to more effectively control/regulate the aboriginal sustenance hunting of ram mountain sheep has been increasingly recognized in recent years.
7. The transmission of diseases to mountain sheep from domestic livestock continues to be of concern. The increasing use of domestic sheep grazing as a forest silviculture brush control measure could result in the exposure of wild sheep to domestic sheep diseases. Also, the importation of exotic sheep (i.e., barbary sheep, mouflon sheep) by some domestic livestock interests have disease transmission and genetic interbreeding implications for indigenous mountain sheep.